



**Giani Gurdit Singh**

**1923-2007**

# Gurmat Acharya, Sahit Shiromani Giani Gurdit Singh

Roopinder Singh

Gurmat Acharya is the title that the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee conferred upon him on February 24, 1991, to recognise his contribution to the Sikh religion, especially his work on ancient religious manuscripts. Sahit Shiromani is the marquee that became his when the Languages Department, Punjab, recognised his contribution on November 1, 2007. Much before he won these laurels and many others that he gathered over the years, I had my own title for Giani Gurdit Singh—Papa.

Mithewal, the village he immortalised through the power of his pen, was where his bhog was held on February 4, 2007. It marked the end of a journey that had begun over eight decades ago. Mithewal then was surrounded by sand dunes; crops were sparse, irrigation facilities practically non-existent. The land did not produce anything of substance.

## **His *pind* and *bachpan***

The people were hardy, and one of them, Hira Singh, had gone out to seek his fortune by working on the canals that were then being built. He went to the Dulha region, now in Pakistan. The region, which produced the legend of Heer and Ranjha, gave work to Hira Singh. He spent nearly 12 years working as a contractor, building bridges across canals and laying rail tracks. He did well, as is still evident when we look at the “outer” house, which was on the outskirts of the village.

The words “Ek Onkar Sat Guru Parsad, Sat Kartar” are emblazoned on the entrance arch of the house, as is a stylised “surya”. The gate is big enough to accommodate a *rath* that the family owned, and has a lot of space for livestock. The real home was the “inner” home, where my grandmother lived.

Hira Singh had five daughters and a son, Gurdit Singh, who was born around 1923. He left an indelible impression of goodness and religious simplicity on the young lad, though they were not destined to live together for long. He treated him “more as a friend than a son”.

Childhood was fun, love for the only male child of the family, games and a congenial atmosphere at home. There was no school in the village, and Gurdit Singh learnt the basics of Gurbani and Gurmukhi at the local gurdwara. He was a sturdy lad, proud of his prowess at wielding the sickle while harvesting,



A passport photograph of a young Giani Gurdit Singh who always wanted to explore new vistas and visit different countries. He was a frequent traveller to Pakistan, the UK, the USA, Thailand, and Singapore.

of being able to lift heavy objects and even a bit of wrestling.

Yet at night, he would put on a lamp and study. His mother, Nihal Kaur, was indulgent about this habit of Gurdit Singh. The childhood came to an abrupt halt when Hira Singh passed away. He had been ailing for a while.

### **Responsibilities and quest for learning**

The young Gurdit Singh now had to shoulder the responsibility of looking after the entire family. The family fortune, evident from the grandeur of the house that Hari Singh built, depleted fast. Gurdit Singh tried his hand at farming, and then did some odd jobs, but there were few means of earning a decent livelihood.

He continued to study and would go down to the nearby town of Mandi Ahmedgarh in order to read back issues of newspapers that a kindly soul kept for him there. The insatiable urge to know more kept pulling him away from the village and from the mainstream. It was only when he managed to sort out



**Giani ji and Sardarni Inderjit Kaur with their son, Roopinder Singh**

affairs at home that he moved.

Even at that time, he wanted to study Guru Granth Sahib. He would find out about religious debates and listen to speakers, or read about them in the *Khalsa Akhbaar* or other newspapers.

### Young prodigy

When he was barely 23, in 1946, he attended a Sarbat Khalsa debate at the Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Amritsar, where the issue was whether the composition Ragmala, printed at the end of Guru Granth Sahib, was to be considered Gurbani or not.

This has been a contentious issue and top scholars were pitted against one another. Giani Gurdit Singh held the opinion that Ragmala was not Gurbani. At one point, he was asked by the then Jathedar of Akal Takht to speak if he had a point to make.

“I had never spoken in a public gathering till then. My knees were trembling at the prospect. I prayed to Akalpurkh, and started speaking.” He spoke on, and on. He had gone to many places and seen many manuscripts of Adi Granth.

So impressed was the gathering by his research that the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) offered him a job as research scholar. The letter of appointment mentioned that his pay and other emolu-



Roopinder Singh and Ravinder Singh (right) playing with their mother, Sardarni Inderjit Kaur

ments would be decided by the President of the SGPC.

An excited and happy Giani Gurdit Singh went to Bhai Randhir Singh, a freedom fighter and saint. Bhai Sahib too was delighted, but he cautioned: *Naukri Nau Kari*. A job would be a nine-linked chain around him. “Bhai Sahib blessed me and said that I would get jobs for many people, Guru would give me everything without my holding a job”, he would recall. The first book that he published was in 1945, titled *Raag Mala di Asliat (The reality of Ragmala)*.

My father served many organisations, held various positions, but he was never employed by anyone. With Bhai Randhir Singh’s blessings, he moved to Patiala and was soon working with Sardar Gian Singh Rarewala, a prominent administrator of the Patiala state.

### **Editor and publisher**

In 1947, he started and edited *Parkash*, a daily Punjabi newspaper from Patiala. He set up a printing press at the edge of the city near the Motibagh palace, and it soon became a gathering place for such scholars as Prof Ganda Singh and Prof Pritam Singh. *Parkash* was the premier Punjabi daily newspaper of PEPSU.

During this period, he not only wrote extensively in the newspaper, but also published two books, *Bhavan de Desh (Emotional Missives)*, a collection of poems in 1950 and *Achchoh Sikhraan (Unattainable Paradigms)*, a collection of poems in 1955.



**Celebrating Roopinder Singh's birthday at Government College for Women, Patiala.**

Ever active in religious affairs, Giani Gurdit Singh was appointed secretary of the Dharam Arth Board, PEPSU, in 1948. He started and edited a monthly literary magazine, *Jiwan Sandesh*, in 1953. He helped Prof Teja Singh, who was then compiling the first Punjabi dictionary. In his autobiography, *Aarsi*, Prof Teja Singh mentions in laudatory terms the contribution of the young man.

### **Chandigarh's call**

Now that he had made a name in Patiala, it was time to move on. A new city, Chandigarh, beckoned him. He moved there even as it was being built and with him moved the press and the paper. *Parkash* continued as a daily till 1961, and subsequently, it was published as a weekly till 1978.

Soon after Giani Gurdit Singh moved to Chandigarh, he became Member, Legislative Council, Punjab, a position he held from 1956 to 1962. He also founded the Sahitya Sabha, Chandigarh, in 1956 and was its first President.

Chandigarh was all about new beginnings. He wrote *Mera Pind*, which was to become the most famous of all his books. Much of it he wrote in a new house that he built in Sector 4. He had married off all his sisters, except for the youngest, and now it was time to start his family.

### **The lady in his life**

Inderjit Kaur Sandhu, a fiery, pretty young Lahore-educated lecturer from Patiala, had accepted his marriage proposal and together they made Chandigarh their home. She belonged to one of the prominent families of Patiala. Her grandfather had served as a "crora" or comptroller of the household for the Maharaja of Patiala, and her father had retired as a Colonel in the



**Sardar Hukam Singh, Sardarni Inderjit Kaur and Giani Gurdit Singh**

Patiala state army.

As secretary of the Mata Sahib Kaur Dal, of which Sardarni Manmohan Kaur Rarewala was the president, she had worked tirelessly for the disadvantaged refugees and Muslim women caught in Patiala just after Partition and that is when the two had met.

Inderjit Kaur Sandhu had earned an MA degree in philosophy from Government College, Lahore, and was in the first batch of students who were awarded an MA degree in Punjabi from Mahindra College, Patiala.

In Chandigarh, she became Vice-Principal of Government Basic Training College. Rewards come in various forms. Giani Gurdit Singh's love for the pastoral life of Punjab was recognised by UNESCO, which gave him the prize for Punjabi literature for the book *Tith Tihar* in 1960. The couple's love brought about a bonny lad, who they decided to call Roopinder Singh.

### **Documenting Punjab's folklore**

A great friendship was also formed the same year between two unlikely persons, film actor and literature buff Balraj Sahni and the author of *Mera Pind*. Balraj Sahni and my father were quite close to each other all their lives. Balraj Sahni presented a Grundig spool tape recorder that operated on batteries to record the sounds of Punjab's villages.

Ravinder Singh, their younger son, was born a year or so later. We grew up in the sprawling Sector 4 house. It was fun to walk down to Carmel Convent School, across the road in Sector 9, and then to St John's Public School, which



Giani Ji being honoured at a public gathering at Takhat Sri Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo. He was conferred the title of "Gurmat Acharaya" on this occasion.



was a little further away. Often we would walk back, kicking a stone that we found on the way and “bringing” it back home.

For Giani Gurdit Singh, time was divided between the Punjab Legislative Council, and running his newspaper, *Prakash*. Pratap Singh Kairon was the Chief Minister of Punjab then. He was fond of Giani Gurdit Singh, as were Giani Kartar Singh, Sardar Gian Singh Rarewala and others. At times, he would find himself as a conduit for those who were unable to communicate with each other because of political contingencies.

### **A university and a takht**

At the height of the Punjabi Suba movement came the idea of Punjabi University, in the establishment of which he played a significant role. In the House, he also raised the issue of the administration, budget, holdings and the historicity of gurdwaras in PEPSU. The government then published a 1200-page report on the basis of an eight-month survey it undertook. This report had an enormous impact on the administration of these gurdwaras.

Earlier, Takht Sri Damdama Sahib was not officially recognised as the fifth Takht of the Sikhs. It was Giani Gurdit Singh who wrote the report on the basis of which official recognition was accorded to Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, both by the SGPC and the Punjab Government. Much later, the Takht recognised his services and honoured him at a public function, presided over by the president of the SGPC, in 1991.

As a Member of Legislative Council (MLC), he was a member of various committees, where he contributed in different ways. Once, he recollected how he was asked by Kairon to review a list of proposed textbooks for students. There was some disquiet among prominent academics that an “unlettered” person would be reviewing textbooks.

He asked for the books and read them. When the meeting came, he had his notes and he critiqued each of them and pointed out omissions and overlaps in the proposal. At the end of the meeting, Kairon took him aside and told him: “Your analysis was impartial and clear. You have demonstrated why I reposed faith in you.”

### ***Parkash*, the newspaper**

Shop-cum-flat No. 1 in Sector 18, where the *Parkash* newspaper office and press were located, became the venue of many discussions as prominent people found their way there. Among them were the prominent scholar Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, poet Shiv Kumar Batalvi, humorist Suba Singh, who also worked for *Prakash*, and Jodh Singh MA, who worked for AIR. Then the major paper in Chandigarh with considerable influence in PEPSU, *Prakash*, and its editor attracted the attention of political leaders, including Giani Zail Singh and Giani Kartar Singh.

He managed to convince Mrs Inderjit Kaur to part with all her savings, a considerable fortune she had kept “safely” in a bank, and “sink” the money in a plot of land in Sector 18, near the printing press. In time, they built a house

there, which in his words, “always provided her with more rent than whatever pay the government gave her”.

### UNESCO recognition

The year 1967 was a significant one for our family. Giani Gurdit Singh won the UNESCO prize for Punjabi literature for the book *Mere Pind da Jiwan* that year, and we moved to Patiala, where my mother took over as Principal of the local Government College for Women. For her, it was a homecoming. She belonged to Patiala and had started her teaching career in the college that she now headed.

Giani Gurdit Singh set up a printing press in a building he bought on Rajbaha Road. As the editor-cum-owner of *Parkash*, which he had converted into a weekly newspaper by then, he would spend time in the press.

The *Rajnitak Kundalias* (political limericks) that he wrote were subtle, current and often memorised by readers and widely recited. In fact, it would be safe to say that he practically created the genre in Punjabi. The bottom of Page 1 of *Parkash* was reserved for what was arguably the most-quoted column of its time.

The articles that the paper carried would be literary, and news was not its most powerful feature. *Parkash* still circulated well. My brother and I contributed our mite by pasting 2-paisa stamps on the papers, taking the bundles to a nearby post office and cancelling the stamps with postmarks so that the overworked postal employees always busy with their tea and gossip would not have to bother with this chore of mass mailing.

The paper did not make much money. However, insolvency was never an issue, thanks to continual reprint orders of *Mera Pind* (first published in 1961) and its family: *Mera Pind da Jiwan* (Life of my Village, 1967), and the series of books that led to *Mera Pind*, which were published in 1960—*Tith Tihar* (Functions & Festivals) *Reetan te Rewaj* (Traditions and Customs),



A family photograph taken after Sardarni Inderjit Kaur took over as Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University, Patiala.

*Mere Pind di Rup Rekha* (Facets of my Village) and *Viah Dian Rasma* (Customs of Marriage).

### **Family traditions**

A family tradition was to sit at the dining table and rhyme. Often the need to rhyme overtook the content, but it was always fun, and educative. Reading and discussing issues came naturally, given the home environment and being always surrounded by elders.

We were lucky in that we studied at Yadavindra Public School, which was just across the road from our house, a former minor palace called Bhupindra Kothi, with an attached mango orchard.

We brothers particularly remember a shop near Quila Mubarik where we could sign and get books. At that stage, they were largely comics, but thanks to surprising support from our mother, they were allowed. We were introduced to many a classic this way, though even I cannot find any literary merit in the endless Commando comics that we bought and had bound copies of. Purists might object, but I must confess that this was barter, the bookseller being compensated with copies of Gianiji's books.

### **Awards and honours**

In 1969, the quincentenary celebrations of the birth of Guru Nanak were held in Patiala. The college became a venue of Guru Nanak Mahima Kirtan Darbar, which my mother organised, and to which my father contributed wholeheartedly. It was a resounding success and left a lasting impact on participants, especially foreign scholars, who were provided with translations of Gurbani *shabads* in form of beautiful booklets.

A year later, Punjabi University, Patiala, decided to give the painter Sobha



**With Professor Harbans Singh, Editor of the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, at Punjabi University, Patiala.**

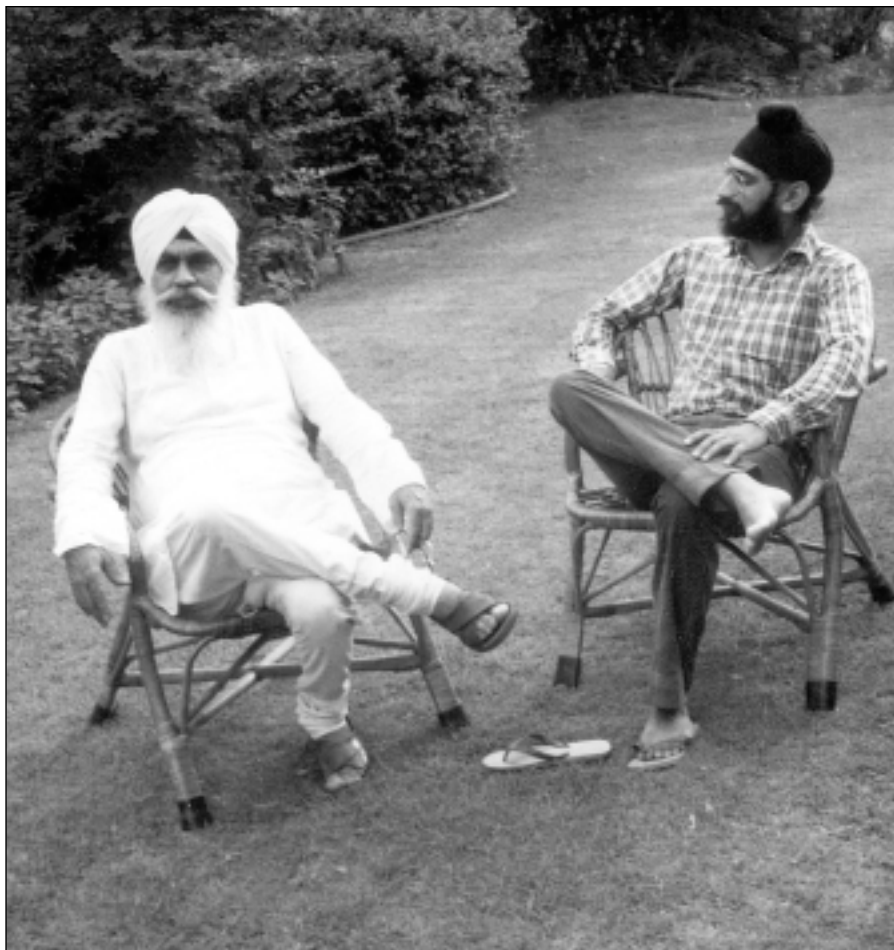
Singh and Giani Gurdit Singh an honorary scholarship, for their lifetime. It entailed a stipend and the services of some office staff.

### **Evangelical endeavours**

An evangelical phase in Giani Gurdit Singh's life can be traced to his becoming the general secretary of the Singh Sabha Shatabdi Committee in Amritsar in 1973. Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra was behind this initiative, which also involved a former Lok Sabha Speaker, Sardar Hukam Singh, who became the president of the committee.

This meant that the family had to move again. Mrs Inderjit Kaur sought a transfer and she became Principal, Government College for Women, Amritsar. We studied at St Francis School and would often cycle to Darbar Sahib, where, adjacent to the office of the SGPC, our father would be, often surrounded by people, or busy writing or editing something.

The focus was on giving correct information about the Sikh religion and scriptures, to take forward the reform movement started by founders of the



Father and son enjoying a casual moment with each other at the Lodhi Garden residence in New Delhi.

Singh Sabha movement a hundred years ago. Debates and discussions were initiated to understand and thrash out various issues. Panthik Vichar sammelans were held and a new magazine, *Singh Sabha Patrika*, was introduced to disseminate information.

*Singh Sabha Patrika* was a great success, but it came at a cost. *Parkash*, which had been transplanted to Amritsar, was wound up and the printing press sold. All of Giani Gurdit Singh's energy went into the publication of the *Patrika*, which was a monthly that came out with special issues ever so often.

### ***Singh Sabha Patrika***

The special issues were on *Guru Granth Sahib*, *Gurbani*, *kirtan* and the importance of grammar for *Guru Granth Sahib*. Some were devoted to celebrating the contribution of important Sikh personalities, including those who contributed to the original Singh Sabha movement—Prof Gurkukh Singh of Oriental College, Lahore, who was responsible for making Punjabi a subject of study in 1877, Bhai Dit Singh, a prolific writer, and Jawaher Singh Kapur. Special issues were also devoted to Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha and Principal Teja Singh.

Many of the contributors to these issues and seminars were university professors, who ventured out of the hallowed halls of academia. This in itself was a unique contribution, as his effort that the community should honour promi-



**Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi and Giani Gurdit Singh meet at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi**

nent religious personalities and scholars who had made a significant contribution to the study of Sikhism. The SGPC and the Jathedars of Akal Takht, Takht Sri Anandpur Sahib and Takht Sri Damdama Sahib and the Singh Sabha Shatabdi Committee, which eventually became Kendri Sri Guru Singh Sabha, would work in consonance for these functions.

Particularly striking were functions held at Anandpur Sahib on Baisakhi. Till practically the last moment, the name of who would be honoured was kept secret. Any canvassing ensured prompt disqualification; all decisions were arrived at through consensus.

### **Honouring unrecognised stalwarts**

Those so honoured included Sant Giani Inder Singh, Sant Gurmukh Singh of Patiala, Babu Mal Singh of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, Bawa Harkishan Singh, Jathedar Achar Singh, Giani Partap Singh, Giani Harbhagat Singh Narangwal and Bibi Bhagwant Kaur. Among the scholars honoured were Sardar Nahar Singh MA, Dr Ganda Singh, Capt Bhag Singh, editor, *The Sikh Review*, Dr Taran Singh of Punjabi University, Patiala, researcher Shamsheer Singh Ashok and Giani Kirpal Singh, who edited *Panth Parkah*.

It was time for us to move on from Amritsar. Mrs Inderjit Kaur became Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University, Patiala, a position she held from 1975 to 1977. She was the first and only woman Vice-Chancellor of a university in North India. My father would, at times, wryly recollect his role in the making of the university that his wife headed.



From left: Sardar Partap Singh MA, Gianiji, Sardar Hukam Singh, Sardarni Inderjit Kaur, Sirdar Kapur Singh ICS and Bhai Sahib Ardaman Singh Bagrian at Gianiji's residence. Ravinder Singh is seated in the foreground.

## In a supportive role

Giani Gurdit Singh gave up the honorary scholarship that the university had awarded him. He played a supportive role, contending that the spotlight was now on the lady who was then one of the three women Vice-Chancellors in the world. He accompanied her to Boston, USA, where she attended an international conference of executive heads of universities, and to the UK, where she delivered the Guru Nanak lecture at the University of Hull, UK, on "Guru Teg Bahadur, Nanak IX". She also spoke at the School of Oriental Studies, London, during the same trip.

He continued with his work for the Singh Sabha, often leading *kirtani jathas*, comprising largely of volunteers from the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, who would fan out to various cities to preach. All top office-bearers of the Singh Sabha Shatabdi Committee would pay for their own travel and other expenses. To be in the committee was considered *sewa*, and no remunerations were sought.

Patiala was also a place where Gianiji too had his roots. He also connected with the academic world and this interaction led to their contributing a lot to the Singh Sabha Patrika and various other endeavours.

*Path bodh samagams* were held, the first one at Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Amritsar, and subsequently in Ludhiana, Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Dadar, Mumbai, Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo, and Gurdwara Rakab Ganj, Delhi. *Path Bodh samagams* were arguably the first multi-disciplinary endeavours to understand Gurbani contained in Guru Granth Sahib. Scholars of various languages and traditional granthis together read Guru Granth Sahib and each line was discussed and debated upon so that its meaning, grammar and pronunciation and punctuation was clear. These *samagams* were at least three-day affairs.



Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra presenting a memento on behalf of the Sikh Educational Society, to Giani Gurdit Singh, recognising his "valuable services in the field of literature" at a public function held in Chandigarh on April 7, 2002.

## **Guru Gobind Singh Marg**

At this time, Giani Zail Singh was the Chief Minister of Punjab. To mark the historic gurdwaras connected with the life of Guru Gobind Singh, he came up with the idea of a road linking Takht Sri Damdama Sahib in Talwandi Sabo to Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib in Anandpur Sahib. Giani Gurdit Singh identified the gurdwaras, and provided the contextually correct quotations from Guru Granth Sahib, which were used to embellish the gates erected in front of these gurdwaras. He also played a pivotal role in mediating between SGPC president Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Chief Minister Giani Zail Singh to ensure that they cooperated and kept politics out of this religious endeavour.

By this time, the Kendri Sri Guru Singh Sabha had become national in character, with an office at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj in Delhi, ably run by Sardar Pratap Singh, an associate of Sardar Hukam Singh.

In 1978, Mrs Inderjit Kaur finally got to live in her house in Sector 18, Chandigarh, after she demitted office as Vice-Chancellor. It was a two-year sabbatical, a time for consolidation and writing, as even Giani Gurdit Singh took a break.

## **Guru Granth Vidya Kendras**

In 1980, my parents moved to Delhi, where my mother had been appointed chairperson, Staff Selection Commission, New Delhi, for a five-year term. I was already studying at St Stephen's College, Delhi, and my brother continued to live in Chandigarh till he graduated. Now Sardar Hukam Singh and Giani Gurdit Singh were together, in the same city, and they again devoted their energies to religion.

A Path Bodh samagam was organised but Giani Gurdit Singh and Sardar Hukam Singh wanted to set up a more lasting institution. Fakir Singh, a businessman, donated five acres at Andheria Mor in Mehrauli and Guru Granth Vidya Kendra was set up to teach Gurbani to young Sikhs and train them in the art of recitation and performing *kirtan*. It is now a flourishing institution, headed by Sardar Hukam Singh's daughter, Mrs Raminder Kaur. Another Guru Granth Vidya Kendra was set up in Sector 28, Chandigarh.

Giani Zail Singh was now the President of India and the two were friends. During this time, Giani Gurdit Singh travelled far and wide to *maths* of various bhagats whose compositions were enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. He continued research, which was to eventually come out in the form of a book titled *Ithas Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Bhagat Bani Bhag* (History of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Bhagat Bani volume) a few years later.

## **The shocks of 1984**

Giani Gurdit Singh felt the shock of the 1984 Army assault on Harmandir Sahib so much that he suffered a heart attack. What added to his pain was the destruction of the Sikh reference library and many invaluable manuscripts that had been kept for safekeeping at the Golden Temple. The tragedy impact-



ed many interpersonal relations too.

On November 31, 1984, he was at the All-India Institute of Medical Science when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was brought there after being shot at by her bodyguards. He got away from the hospital just as violence spread, came home and made arrangements to evacuate the students and teachers of the Guru Granth Vidya Kendra, Mehrauli, of which he was the president, to a safer place. We all shared the helplessness, anger and terror that followed in the days after, but thanks to his foresight, and help from kind-hearted neighbours, no one from the Kendra faced physical harm. The Kendra itself was trashed and burnt down, but such was the determination in those days that it was up and running within weeks.

Dr DeBakey examined Giani Gurdit Singh at Houston, USA, and performed an angioplasty on him. Giani Gurdit Singh stayed with Bhai Harbans Lal for a few days and later he lectured at various gurdwaras in the USA even as he recouped.

### **Back to Chandigarh**

When he returned to India, the family moved to Chandigarh, back to the house he had built in 1958. He devoted his days to the Guru Granth Vidya Kendra and had also to his writing. It was during this period that his work, *Ithas Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Bhagat Bani Bhag*, was finally finished to his satisfaction. The book was printed in 1990.

Giani Gurdit Singh often worked on many manuscripts simultaneously. He



**Surjit Singh Barnala, Justice R S Narula and Giani Gurdit Singh at a function at the Guru Granth Vidya Kendra at Mehrauli, New Delhi.**

was generous with his time to a fault with those who came to see him, but could be impatient with those who were unable to grasp what he said quickly enough.

In the last decade of his life, he devoted a lot of time to his family and to organising and finishing the material collected during a lifetime of research. He was given the Doordarshan Panj Pani Sanman 2005 for his contribution to Punjabi heritage and culture. Doordarshan also did a brief documentary on him.

He then published *Ithas Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Mundavani*. The book was initially well received. It became controversial after the Jathedar of Takht Sri Patna Sahib criticised it. The scholar in him wanted to prove his point, but a lifetime of devotion and *sewa* of the Panth did not allow him to do so. This was a painful period, which he faced bravely. In time he got back to where he had started, his writing, and looking after the institutions he had built.

Giani Gurdit Singh went for a meeting of the Guru Granth Vidya Kendra, Delhi, on Tuesday, September 12, 2006, when he called me and told me that that he was having a heart attack. A short while later, doctors confirmed his diagnosis. He was shifted to Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj, where Dr Upendra Kaul performed an angioplasty and put a stent in one of the arteries.

He was in good spirits and told his wife: "I was at the doorway, but God wants me to do more work." I brought him back to Chandigarh on the 17th and he went back to work on the history of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

### **Punjabi Sahit Shiromani**

Recognition came in the form of the Punjabi Sahit Shiromani Award 2006, which he received in Patiala on November 1 from Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, Deputy Chief Minister, Punjab. It was a marvellous occasion when family and



**Gianiji with his extended family and friends after the Punjabi Sahit Shiromani Award 2006 ceremony in Patiala**

friends had come over to Patiala, including a contingent from Mithewal.

The citation of the award read: "A relentless champion of Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiati, Giani Gurdit Singh has created a unique identity for himself as a scholarly author, well-known journalist and editor and distinguished researcher in the fields of Punjab, Punjabi language, Punjabi literature, Punjabi folklore and Sikh religion.

"He has painstakingly studied the old manuscripts, handwritten *birs* and other ancient works, and penned well-researched tomes such as *Itihas Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and *Ragmala di asliat*....

"During his tenure as a member of the Punjab Legislative Council, he was instrumental in bringing forth resolutions which eventually paved the way for setting up of the erstwhile Punjabi Mehkama (now Languages Department), Punjabi University, and Takht Sri Damdama Sahib. He has ... made a vast qualitative and quantitative contribution in the Punjabi literary spectrum."

### **His house, his final resting place**

A few days later, the new stent in his heart got blocked and he was shifted to Fortis Hospital, Mohali, from where he was discharged after a week. This time, Giani Gurdit Singh was told that his heart had been badly damaged. He felt weak, and was told that he could not travel.

He continued his writing work, though the pace was slower. He was as alert as ever, but physical infirmities irritated him. Yet, he retained his sense of humour and on Lohri day, he joked around at home and basically brought cheer back into our lives.



With admirers from Germany a few days before he passed away.

Unfortunately, this was short-lived. We had breakfast together on January 17, 2007. He lay down to rest, and an hour or so later, his very bed in the house he had built for himself became his final resting place. He had passed away peacefully.

As Giani Gurdit Singh wrote in *Mera Pind*, his father said: “Now Kaka, it is for you to make sure that I get peace of mind. All my life I have striven only for an untarnished reputation. May Sahab give you the strength you need to do good. Do not ever put my fair name to the mud.” He did what his father enjoined him to do, and the message lives on.

